

Fee-paying foreign students offered double the number of clearing courses

- [Home](#)
- [All News](#)
- Fee-paying foreign students offered double the number of clearing courses

19 Sep 2018



English and non-EU students are able to apply for double the number of university clearing courses than Scottish youngsters, new analysis has revealed.

With clearing officially closing tomorrow, aspiring students who live here can access 596 courses.

However, that figure more than doubles to 1251 for English fee-paying students, and 1267 for those foreign students from outside the EU who will also pay to study.

The glaring disparity is a result of the SNP's policy on free tuition, which is forcing universities to place a cap on the number of home-grown students they can accept for financial reasons.

The Scottish Conservatives have said the situation is harming the prospects of young people right across the country, and will cause damage to the economy further down the line.

The party's analysis also revealed there are four times the number of clearing courses available in Wales (2212) than here for Scots.

And even the north of England presents more options currently for Scottish students, with 796 available courses.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

"These statistics are quite incredible, and the situation is entirely of the SNP government's making.

"Its policies on who does and doesn't pay tuition fees is forcing universities to sideline Scottish youngsters.

"Quite how that's a government working in the interests of its people is a mystery.

"The capping of places is harming our own children's educational prospects, and doing nothing to close the attainment gap between rich and poor.

“In the medium-to-long term, it will also damage the economy, because we know people from other countries are less likely to stay on and work here than native students.”

[Plans to cut defence spending in independent Scotland ‘irresponsible and short-sighted’](#)

- [Home](#)
- [All News](#)
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17 Sep 2018



Plans to cut defence spending as part of a revised blueprint for an independent Scotland are “irresponsible and short-sighted”, a Scottish Conservative MP and former naval officer has said.

In a report published today, former Nationalist defence spokesman Bruce Crawford has said that Scotland could save more than £2bn a year by creating a slimmed-down defence force.

He has said that the Scottish military after independence should be one third smaller than it is at present, with no fast jets, big surface ships, tanks or nuclear weapons.

Scottish Conservative MP for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine Andrew Bowie, who served in the Royal Navy, has condemned the assessment.

He said: “This plan is a very worrying demonstration of what an independent Scotland’s defence posture could look like.

“NATO members and allies across Europe are beginning to increase spending on defence given the re-emergence of the Russian threat, cyber security and the continuing state of flux in the Middle East.

“To propose a plan so substantially short of the 2 percent of GDP minimum demanded by the alliance is frankly irresponsible and short sighted.

“The fact is that, at present, Scotland is served by being a part of the United Kingdom which is internationally recognized as having some of the best equipped and most adaptable armed forces in the world.

“The UK is also a member of the five eyes intelligence network and has strong bilateral alliances with France, the USA and others.

“The people of Scotland chose decisively in 2014 to remain part of the UK – and to continue to be defended by the British armed forces.

“That is something the SNP simply don’t get.”

[Dog control notices rise by almost 300%](#)

17 Sep 2018



A “concerning” increase in the use of dog control notices (DCN) has been identified by the Scottish Conservatives.

The latest figures, outlined in a written answer from the Scottish Government, show that DCNs have increased by 247 since 2011-12, a rise of 270 percent.

The increase could potentially be even more as Glasgow is not included in the numbers.

The local authority with the highest usage of dog control notices last year is Fife with 59, a staggering 500 percent increase since 2011, while the lowest are Inverclyde and Edinburgh with none at all.

A DCN can be issued to owners of dogs that have been shown to be ‘out of control’ and require the owner to modify and manage the dog’s behaviour in order to control it in the interest of public safety.

The DCN places a statutory duty on dog owners to keep their dogs under control and may contain a number of measures that the owner is required to implement within a stated timeframe.

Commenting on the figures Scottish Conservative MSP, Maurice Golden said:

“This continuous increase in the usage of dog control notices is concerning as it indicates more incidents of ‘out of control’ dogs have taken place and people have been put at risk.

“Owning a dog is a real joy but also comes with responsibilities. All dog owners must ensure that their dogs are trained, socialised and supervised so that they are not a risk to humans or animals.

“The steep rise in the usage of the control notices suggests that this is a worsening problem and this poses a greater risk to the public and other animals.

“The dramatic regional variations in dog control notices may also suggest that they are being enforced differently which, in itself, raises questions.

“Ultimately dog owners must take responsibility for their own dogs, take the time to train and socialise them appropriately and then everyone will enjoy having a dog as part of the family.

“Local authorities must use the powers they have to intervene meaningfully to ensure that no one is at risk from a dangerous dog.”

[SNP secret subsidies to Ferguson Marine Engineering must be explained](#)

- [Home](#)
- [All News](#)
- SNP secret subsidies to Ferguson Marine Engineering must be explained

14 Sep 2018



The Scottish Conservatives are calling for the SNP to make a statement to Holyrood to clarify why it loaned Ferguson Marine Engineering £45m of taxpayers money, without any parliamentary scrutiny.

Documents published under freedom of information legislation have shown that Ferguson Marine Engineering received two loans from the SNP totalling £45m; an initial loan of £15m in September 2017 and a subsequent loan of £30m in June this year.

The initial loan was kept secret due to ‘commercial confidentiality’ and has only just come to light.

Concerns have now been raised about why the two loans were needed when the firm has also received almost £100m from publicly funded Calmac to build two new ferries.

The Scottish Conservatives have therefore requested that the SNP makes a statement to the Scottish Parliament clarifying all the details.

The SNP has already come under fire for delays to the project, while the company itself is understood to be dissatisfied with ministers’ handling of

delays and budget difficulties.

Jamie Greene, Scottish Conservative transport spokesman said:

“This SNP Government has a record of secrecy, cover ups, and behind closed-doors deals.

“There are now mounting question marks over its handling of this vital ferries contract, and the suspicion is that the SNP is once again trying to hide the facts from emerging.

“When huge sums of public money are at stake, the public has a right to know what is going.

“The Minister needs to come to the chamber next week and do just that.”

[Holyrood to be given chance to scrap p1 testing](#)

- [Home](#)
- [All News](#)
- Holyrood to be given chance to scrap p1 testing

13 Sep 2018



MSPs will have the chance next week to formally vote against the mandatory testing of primary 1 schools pupils, it has been revealed.

The Scottish Conservatives will use their party business slot on Wednesday to suggest ending the practice, which has been widely criticised by parents and teaching unions.

With all opposition parties opposed to p1 testing, it is likely that a majority in the Scottish Parliament will vote to scrap the assessments, even if the SNP sticks to its guns.

It will then be up to the nationalist government whether or not to accept the will of the Scottish Parliament.

Nicola Sturgeon was given the chance to publicly u-turn on p1 testing today at First Minister's Questions, but refused to do so.

The Scottish Conservatives remain supportive of testing at later ages in school.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

“This is a chance for opposition parties to come together to end the SNP’s system of p1 tests which have not only proved difficult to administer but which are not providing the most meaningful educational outcomes for five-year-olds.

“We firmly believe that there has to be a different approach in p1 compared to what happens further on in school.

“The Scottish Conservatives will use our party business to demonstrate the educational evidence in this regard and why it has led to so much concern among teachers.

“We remain fully supportive of testing in schools among older children.

“Standardised tests at p4, p7 and s3 should be a key part of educational development and the monitoring of schools’ overall progress.

“At present, there is too much scope for schools to avoid the standardised approach further up the school, thereby making it very difficult to measure what progress is being made within the Curriculum for Excellence.

“This weakness cannot be consistent with narrowing the attainment gap.

“We believe all parties are united in their desire to see standards raised and that the standards must reflect the best educational interests of each pupil at every age in their school career.”